The Curse of Empire and the Russian Lie

Russia and Ukraine in Context

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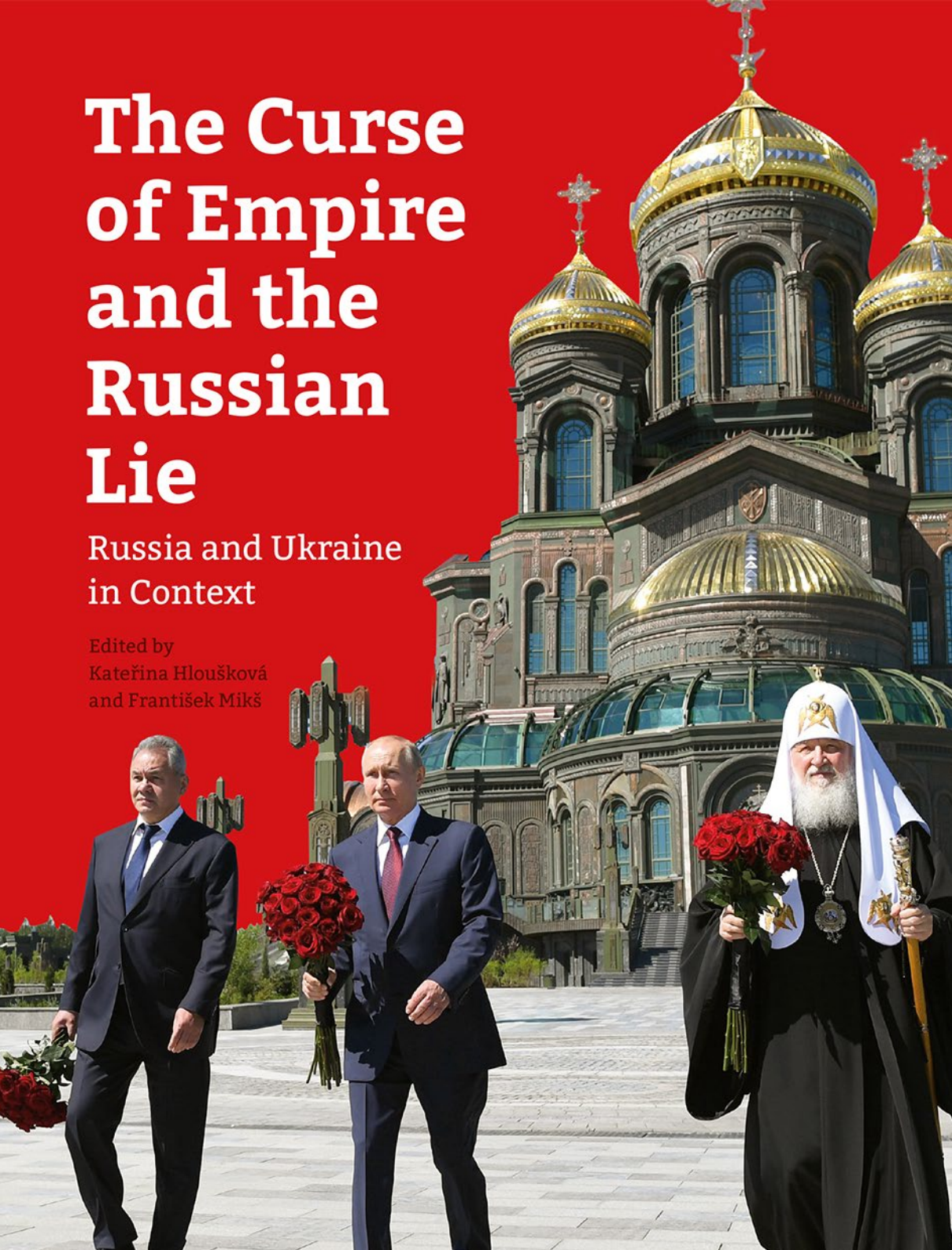

President Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia lay flowers at a monument to mothers of the victors during a visit to the Orthodox Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces, consecrated to the Resurrection of Christ, on the Day of Memory and Grief near Kubinka, Moscow region, Russia. On 22 June 2020 Russia marked the 79th anniversary since Nazi Germany troops invaded the USSR during World War II. Reproduced from: Profimedia.CZ

VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD, BANISH PUTIN!

The Russian Orthodox Church needs its own 'special operation' to demilitarise, desovietise and denazify

Josef Mlejnek Jr

The war in Ukraine has not only brought much misfortune and suffering – it has also thrown up many contrasts. 'Brothers and sisters, we have just prayed to the Virgin Mary. This week, the city that bears her name, Mariupol, has become a city of martyrs in the terrible war ravaging Ukraine. Before the barbarism of killing children and innocent and defenceless citizens, no strategic reasons hold: the only thing to be done is to cease the unacceptable armed aggression before cities are reduced to cemeteries,' said Pope Francis on 13 March 2022 in one of his responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[1]

'You know, I remember these words from the Bible: "There is no greater love than when someone gives up his life for his friends",' was how Putin paraphrased the Gospel of John only a few days later in front of a packed Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow at a celebration of the eighth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea. He meant the Russian soldiers who had fallen during the 'special military operation' in Ukraine. 'They help each other, support each other and when needed they shield each other from bullets with their bodies like brothers. Such unity we have not had for a long time,' praised the Russian president.[2]

Understandably, Russia's aggression has been resonating strongly in churches throughout the world, and has been particularly eruptive on Ukraine's religious scene. And arguably, the long dispute within the Orthodox Church concerning Ukraine's autocephaly (independence) – more precisely, the historical and political essence of this dispute – is one of the main reasons for the Russian invasion.

AN ORTHODOX SCHISM

The city of Mariupol received its current name in the late 18th century, officially to honour Russian Tsarina Maria Feodorovna (originally Princess Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg), the wife of Tsar Paul I, but actually it was more likely named after the Greek settlement of Mariampol in Crimea, whose population was forcibly removed at the time into the present-day Mariupol. They took with them an icon of the Mother of God, now referred to as the Mariupol or Crimea Icon. The original disappeared during the Stalinist rage, and whether the

later copy kept in Mariupol will survive Putin's rampage is an unanswered question. Before the war, most of the churches in the largely Russian-speaking port city of half a million people belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), abbreviated to UOC MP, a part of the Russian Orthodox Church. But that certainly did not mean these were gatherings chiefly of Russian nationalists, let alone of advocates of Ukraine's 'unification' with Russia. Indeed, the city population's doggedly heroic resistance to the aggressors provides the best testimony of their position.

Only a few churches in Mariupol came under the autocephalous (independent), and strongly nationally oriented, Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Throughout Ukraine, Russian aggression has been strongly counterproductive, as even that segment of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy that until then recognised the authority of Moscow has started to secede. With horrible clarity, the destruction of Mariupol has demonstrated the senselessness of the Russian action, motivated in part by the purported religious proximity of Russians and Ukrainians, allegedly justifying their unification under the Kremlin sceptre. About two-thirds of Ukrainians profess Orthodoxy, and about a tenth support the Greek Catholic Church, which though recognising the authority of the Pope, uses the Byzantine rite.[3]

According to the head of the autocephalous OCU, Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kyiv, every bomb, missile and bullet of the Russian aggressors definitively busts the myth of a 'Holy Rus' and a 'triune [Russian] nation'.[4] Here Epiphanius refers to an essentially imperial concept, developed from the 19th century onwards, according to which the Russian nation consists of Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians, but it is the Russians of Moscow, or the Great Russians, who play the first fiddle in this ensemble, despite proclamations

of equality. Both Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) rely on a modern version of this concept.

In early 2019, Epiphanius's OCU was granted autocephalous status (independence) by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, which the ROC refused to recognise. Orthodoxy has a complicated structure; roughly speaking it is a confederation of autocephalous churches, and the formal leader, Patriarch Bartholomew I, certainly does not enjoy powers comparable to those of the Roman Catholic Pope. Bartholomew had to justify the recognition of OCU autocephaly by a certain historical and legal interpretation of Eastern European ecclesiastical realities in the 17th century. And beyond the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which is one of the autocephalous churches, the new Ukrainian Church was recognised before the war only by the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Churches of Greece and Cyprus. The others of the fifteen or so autocephalous Orthodox Churches were still (before the Russian invasion) hesitating and waiting. The Serbian Orthodox Church, a close ally of Moscow, explicitly refused to recognise the OCU. The reason for saying 'fifteen or so' is that the autocephaly of some churches is disputed in Orthodoxy, and the exact number therefore cannot be determined.

On 21 February 2022 in a speech in which he showed willingness to recognise the independence of the separatist republics in eastern Ukraine, Vladimir Putin included the Ukrainian church schism – i.e., the split of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy into an independent church and a church subject to Moscow – and the alleged infringements by Ukrainian authorities of the rights of UOC MP believers and priests on his list of anti-Ukrainian rebukes.[5] Thus the schism was in fact one of the reasons for the war.

However, the UOC MP responded to the war in ways that largely went against Putin's intentions. In a session at St Panteleimon Women's Monastery near Kyiv on 27 May, its leadership officially expressed its disagreement with the position of Patriarch Kirill on the war in Ukraine and declared independence. Point 4 of the official UOC MP resolution says, 'The Council adopted appropriate amendments to the Statute with regards to the administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, all of which testify to the full independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.'[6] However, it is not entirely clear what exactly this proclamation means, because independence (autocephaly) is granted to a new independent church by the Mother Church (thus for the UOC MP this would have to be done by the Russian Orthodox Church, and this certainly did not take place) and the act should also be recognised by all the other autocephalous churches, including the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The proclamation avoids the term 'autocephaly'.

The UOC MP leadership was largely pushed to issue its Solomonic declaration of independence, worthy of 'The Clever Farmgirl', by practical circumstances: many parishes left for the OCU; some UOC MP priests and bishops continued to refuse to mention Kirill as the head of the church during services; and a Sword of Damocles in the form of the threat that the Ukrainian authorities would simply ban it as it had a direct link with the aggressor's headquarters. Yet especially after what the Russian military has been doing in the eastern and south-eastern – predominantly Russian-speaking – areas of Ukraine, where the UOC MP had the most support, it is difficult to imagine it will fully return to the bosom of Moscow.

The path to the full unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy will be quite complicated, even thorny. The cited proclamation of the UOC

MP, which wants to persevere as a strong organisation, does call for dialogue with the OCU, but it is also strongly critical of it, for instance by saying, 'It is especially unfortunate that the recent actions of the Patriarch of Constantinople in Ukraine, which resulted in the formation of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine", only deepened misunderstandings and led to physical confrontation.' That 'physical confrontation' seems to refer to the 'tug-of-war' between the two entities over church buildings (parishes).

A WAR OF MIDDLE EASTERN CHARACTERISTICS

Ukraine is crucial for the Russian Orthodox Church. Although the UOC MP, a relatively autonomous part of the ROC, saw a sharp decline in popularity in opinion polls after 2014, it still remained Ukraine's largest Church in terms of the number of church buildings, priests and monasteries. And contrary to popular belief, it also had a pro-Ukrainian patriotic wing, which did not join the new autocephalous church in 2019 for a combination of canonical, political, economic and personnel reasons. However, alongside it, there was also a pro-Russian wing, the camp of the proponents of the concepts of the 'Russian world' or 'Holy Rus' in its ideologised, nationalist and imperialist form, whose proponent was and is the ROC patriarch and Putin's staunch ally, Kirill.

Since 24 February 2022, Patriarch Kirill has continued to stick closely to the official line of the Russian state. As he said in a letter to the acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches,

The interior of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces during its solemn consecration on 14 June 2020. Reproduced from: Russian Ministry of Defence, mil.ru

the conflict's 'initiators are not the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, who came from one Kievan baptismal font, are united by common faith, common saints and prayers, and share common historical fate'. Rather, the West is to blame, constantly pushing NATO and its structures towards Russia's borders and also attempting 'to "re-educate", to mentally remake Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine into enemies of Russia'.[7] In the passage quoted, Kirill succinctly captures

the very core of the ideological and historical identity of his church, and of Putin's contemporary Russian Federation. Both Russians and Ukrainians derive their origins from the Kyivan Rus, from its Christianisation in the 10th century, although, of course, each of the two nations interprets the historical story in its own way. The Ukrainians see the Kyivan Rus as the basis of their identity and distinctiveness, but the Russian Empire, including the present Russian Federation, considers itself the only rightful heir of the Kievan tradition in both its state and church dimensions. From this perspective, Ukrainians are only a somewhat different folkloric variation of the Russian nation, essentially without the right to their own fully sovereign statehood or full ecclesiastical identity.

In April 2009, at a meeting with Ukraine's prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko during her visit to Moscow, Kirill, already then the ROC patriarch, declared: 'I am deeply convinced that the religious factor plays a very significant role when it comes to Russia and Ukraine. We are countries bound by a single tradition, a single history, a single Church. [...] For the Russian Orthodox Church, Kiev with its Hagia Sophia is our Constantinople; it is the spiritual centre and southern capital of Russian Orthodoxy.' Russia and Ukraine 'together constitute the pillars of the Orthodox Eastern Slavonic civilisation'.[8] In summer 2009, Kirill went on a journey to Ukraine, during which he said, 'Kiev is our common Jerusalem. The very first thing that came into my mind after I was appointed to the patriarchal seat was to visit the Holy Land of Kiev.'[9]

The original Jerusalem and the Israeli 'Holy Land' are the cause and the theatre of one of the main global conflicts today. Where Holy Land and Jerusalem are brandished, shooting usually soon follows – if it does not actually happen in parallel with the verbal fireworks. A holy war often flares up. It is no different in the case of Ukraine. The

claim to Kyiv is at the very core of the Russian neo-imperial ideology, intended to justify or legitimise the broader great power aspirations of the Russian state. 'Kyiv as Jerusalem' really does contain the potential for unleashing World War III.

THE SABBATH IN LUZHNIKI

On the eighth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, there was a great celebration at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium – a rally combined with a concert. It caused speculation as to the extent to which the audience, numbering in the tens of thousands, attended of their own free will or were coerced. Russian television interrupted the live broadcast of Putin's speech, allegedly because of the boos of some in the audience. It broadcast it in its entirety, with full applause, only from a recording. It was at Luzhniki that President Putin quoted the Gospel according to John.

Also heard at the Luzhniki Sabbath was, for instance, the pop-rock song 'Donbas is behind us', with the following chorus:

> Half the sky is flame
> Half the sky is smog
> Donbass is behind us
> And God is with us!
> Half the sky is flame
> Half the sky is smog
> Russia is with us
> And God is with us![10]

'Donbass is behind us' alludes to 'Nowhere to retreat – Moscow is behind us!', famous words from 1941. Penned in 2020, the duet by Natalya Kachura and Margarita Lisovina is reputedly rather popular – although at Luzhniki Viktoriya Dayneko had to substitute for Lisovina, who reportedly was expecting a child in Donetsk at the time. The song's popularity resulted in an official video,[11] shot in part on the site of the Memorial to Donbass Liberators in Donetsk (i.e., in the separatist Donetsk People's Republic). Although it is the liberators from German Nazis that are referred to, the video creates a direct link between the 1943 event and the new 'liberation' of the Donbass from alleged Ukrainian fascists in 2015, specifically of the city of Debaltseve. In February 2015, the Ukrainian military suffered a heavy defeat, when it was encircled in the 'Debaltseve Pocket' and had to retreat.

In particular the mentioned clip mirrors Putin's current historical and ideological interpretation of the 'denazification operation in Ukraine', which he directly connects with World War II (the Great Patriotic War), seen as a 'sacred war', an epoch-making struggle between Soviet (Russian) Good and German (now Western, fascist-Ukrainian) Evil. This was illustrated by the slogan on the stage in Luzhniki: 'For a world without Nazism'.

Vladimir Putin does not conceive of the war in Ukraine as a mere regional conflict, with Russia defending its local interests. This is truly a global conflict, a struggle between a pure, 'Holy Rus', an allegedly more spiritual and morally advanced Orthodox civilisation, and a spoilt, materialist and hedonistic West. Russia has long posed as a bastion of traditional values internationally and sought to appeal to many Western conservatives. Mariya Zakharova, the press secretary of Russia's foreign affairs ministry, said at the Luzhniki rally: 'We are

a country and a people that calls its sons and daughters boys and girls. We refuse to refer to humans in the neuter gender.'[12] Similarly, Patriarch Kirill characterised the Russian 'special operation' as a clash that has a metaphysical dimension to it, a global battle of values for the preservation of God's Order. Russia allegedly must protect the righteous Christians in the Donbass, subjected to genocide because, among other things, they refused to hold gay pride parades.[13] 'We are a country and a people who cherish and protect peace, and fight against evil, because darkness is the absence of light and true freedom is freedom from evil. We can't be scared because we live in love and faith. With God,' Zakharova also said at Luzhniki. The question, of course, is which god she had in mind.

A KHAKI-COLOURED FAITH

In 2020, near Kubinka close to Moscow, a bizarre, monumental building was erected in the Patriot Park, close to the Tank Museum and the Shooting Range – the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces.[14] Reaching a height of 95 metres, it ranks among the tallest Orthodox churches in Russia and the world. The architectural style has been described as 'Russian' or 'Russo-Byzantine', but is simply a mechanically applied style of old Russian churches. In 1990s Czechia, similar bad taste was described as 'businessman's baroque'.

Officially dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ, the three--billion-rouble investment has given birth to a peculiar mutant that uses Christianity essentially as a decorative shell. In reality, it is to venerate the official Russian military-nationalist-pseudo-religious

Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill view a model of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in 2018. Reproduced from: www.kremlin.ru

cult that could perhaps be branded Kirillism-Putinism. Incidentally, Sergei Shoigu, the defence minister, is alleged to have exerted a substantial influence over the design.[15]

What is primarily adorated here is the Great Patriotic War or more specifically its official depiction in propaganda. The cathedral was completed in 2020 – the 75th anniversary of the end of the war – and its belfry is therefore 75 metres tall. The architecture incorporates several instances of such numerical symbolism – for example, the diameter of the drum of the main dome is 19.45 meters, referencing the year the

war ended. The stairs leading to the cathedral and its floor are made of cast iron with the addition of half of a ton of melted-down guns and tanks, trophies from Nazi Germany. The shrine is surrounded by a large museum of war called the 'Path of Memory', which among other things houses peculiar relics: Hitler's uniform and cap.

One of the mosaics is dedicated to the participants of wars in which the Soviet Union and Russia have been involved since 1945. The caption starts with the 'civil war' in China and the war in Korea, continues with such items as the 'military conflicts' in Hungary (by which the year 1956 is meant) and Czechoslovakia (1968) and culminates with 'coercing Georgia to peace', the struggle with international terrorism in Syria and the re-annexation of Crimea. However, it also deliberately leaves space for the future. It is no coincidence that Roman Shlyakhtin, writing in *Kommersant* in November 2020, presciently described the building as 'the temple of the future war'.[16]

The solemn consecration was originally planned for 9 May 2020, but due to Covid-19 was postponed until June. Surprisingly enough, Vladimir Putin did not show up on 14 June, apparently fearing infection. He was to have his own mosaic in the cathedral, together with Sergei Shoigu and other luminaries, for the successful operation in Crimea. But ultimately the Church, allegedly acting on the order of the president himself, abandoned the design; as it did for the depiction of Stalin, who was to appear in a mosaic portraying the victory parade in Moscow in May 1945.

Irrespective of this – both mosaics are allegedly complete, but not yet on show – the words of Alexei Lidov, an art historian and expert on Byzantine iconography, hold true: 'the end result of all this is not an Orthodox church. It is a church which speaks not of God, but of

the triumph of sacralized power, and – since Stalin's authority was far from Christian – of power that does not in the least need to be Christian.' In his article for the website *Religion Unplugged*, Lidov, who works in several Russian scholarly and cultural institutions, compared the decorative style inside the building to socialist realism, to the décor of the Moscow metro stations built under Stalin's rule. 'People entering this church,' wrote Lidov, 'will not be praying to the suffering God, but to victorious power, a sort of "heavenly generalissimo". And from the perspective of social psychology it is interesting that many people are quite comfortable with this sort of understanding of Christianity, with the love of God soothingly transformed into the veneration of power.' Although the project of the cathedral has received a turbulent response, and even resistance among some in Russian society, it is according to Lidov a sign of the times, and clearly reflects the contemporary Russian religious consciousness, or the deepest spiritual crisis.[17]

In the end, Vladimir Putin only visited the cathedral on 22 June 2020, the 79th anniversary (i.e., not a major one) of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, that is the anniversary of the beginning of the war in 1941 described in Russia as the Great Patriotic War. World War II actually started in September 1939 with the joint attack of Germany and the Soviet Union, allies at the time, on Poland (the Germans struck on 1 September, the Soviets on the 17th). The first two years of the war, therefore, do not show the Soviet Union in a very flattering light, which is why Russia even today maintains its own interpretation of historical events.

The term 'Great Patriotic War' harks back to the Patriotic War, that is the defeat of Napoleon's Russian campaign, which ended in December 1812 with the destruction of the French *Grande Armée*,

which began with more than half a million men (numbers as high as 675,000 have been cited) and ended with barely a few tens of thousands. Most succumbed to hunger, frost and typhus. In terms of national makeup, this was a truly European army, with just over a hundred thousand ethnic French serving. That is why, in Russia, Napoleon's campaign was sometimes described as the 'invasion of twelve languages'; in any case, it contributed to the birth of modern Russian nationalism, with its natural anti-Western slant. As an act of gratitude for averting the French invasion, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was eventually built in Moscow, to which the aforementioned armed forces cathedral is in a way connected. For its time, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was truly magnificent – it could accommodate seven to ten thousand believers, according to various sources. It comes as no surprise that it took nearly fifty years to build. Involved in decorating the interiors were the best Russian artists of the period, including Viktor Vasnetsov, Vasiliy Vereshchagin and Vasiliy Surikov. The construction was accompanied by disputes concerning its architectural merits, with its eclecticism, overall monstrosity and excessive decoration singled out for criticism. Part of the cathedral was conceived as a gallery (or a gallery and museum) commemorating the triumph over Napoleon. The cathedral therefore also served as a memorial – visitors could acquaint themselves with the names of participants (commanders) in the 1812 war, and see mementoes of the period. During the Russo-Japanese War and World War I the cathedral also served as a special information centre where people could learn the names of the fallen.

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, according to the historian Orlando Figes, 'half war museum and half church' and a 'monument to the divine mission of the Russian monarchy',[18] was consecrated in

The Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka close to Moscow. Reproduced from: Wikimedia Commons

May 1883, the day before the coronation of Tsar Alexander III. Beyond a place for religious services, it was also a site of national celebration.

Stalin had it blown up. The cathedral was meant to be replaced by a monstrous Palace of the Soviets, surpassing the tallest structure in the world at the time, the Empire State Building in New York City. The war buried these plans. Nikita Khrushchev embellished the empty site with the enormous circular Moskva Pool. After the fall of the Soviet Empire, a replica of the cathedral was constructed, thanks to significant support from President Boris Yeltsin and the mayor of Moscow, Yuriy Luzhkov. Although construction companies linked with the two politicians made tidy profits, whether the Russian soul, depressed by decades of communism, profited spiritually is another

question. We might well ask whether a sanctuary was built in Moscow that was actually dedicated to something else entirely than Jesus Christ, namely the Russian imperial mixture of nationalised religion, intense jingoism and militarism made sacred.

SACRED WAR TURNED INSIDE OUT

Started by Yeltsin, the reconstruction of masonry and ideas was carried on enthusiastically by Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill. The Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka vividly reflects this development, as compared with the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour it has pushed the religious aspect further into the background, and foregrounded the military and belligerent aspects. Military green prevails and the towers resemble missiles. Inside, variations on ancient icons are interspersed with battle scenes, or the two are mixed; on the stained glass ceiling, visitors see not angels, but Red Army military orders from the Great Patriotic War. Yet perhaps no wonder; that war was officially described as sacred, certainly in the 1941 song 'The Sacred War', described by Winston Churchill as a 'secret musical weapon':

> Let noble wrath
> Boil over like a wave!
> This is the people's war,
> A sacred war!

A mosaic in the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Kubinka near Moscow dedicated to the participants of wars in which the Soviet Union and Russia have been involved since 1945, including the 'military conflict' in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The list ends with the 2014 annexation of Crimea, but space has been left for other operations. Reproduced from: Konstantin Buzin's Facebook page

Thus goes the chorus of this impassioned and devastating secular hymn, which continues to be in the repertory of the Red Army Choir and upon hearing which audiences in Russia often stand to attention.[19] When in 1941 Stalin began to feel the noose tightening around his neck, he very nearly crawled back to the cross. His regime no longer so furiously opposed the church services and processions that took place in the besieged Leningrad and elsewhere. In 1943, Stalin officially restored the Orthodox Church, which he had virtually exterminated – tens of thousands of priests fell victim to his terror. He understood the Church's moral and mobilising potential. But the Church paid a huge price for this in the form of total submission to the Communist authorities. Especially for senior dignitaries, cooperation with the KGB became the rule, and this remained true until the end of communism. The Soviet regime also involved the subjugated Church in the propaganda struggle for peace and sent Church officials to capitalist countries for one purpose or another, including one Vladimir Mikhaylovich Gundyayev, codenamed Mikhaylov, who eventually became patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009. Putin and Kirill are actually buddies from the same firm (now operating under the initials FSB), Putin representing the secular arm, Kirill the spiritual one. This is yet another in a long series of degradations of the noble Byzantine idea of symphony, or harmony of State and Church.

The legacy of the Great Patriotic War is understandably still strong in the Russian collective consciousness today. It has a natural basis, and the heroism and suffering of ordinary people during the war years certainly cannot be denied. However, from the outset it has also been fed by propaganda, and the propaganda construct of the Great Patriotic War made sacred constituted a fundamental

pillar serving to legitimise the Soviet regime after 1945, a pillar that was more load-bearing than class struggle.

Putin's regime has drawn on these tendencies, resuscitating them and breathing new life into them, but it is more like the life of a viral infection of some kind. And he exploits them fully with respect to Ukraine too, with Russian propaganda since 2014 portraying the fighting in the Donbass as an analogue to the struggle with fascists, now no longer German but Ukrainian, supported by the immoral, spoilt West. The alleged special operation in Ukraine has now received the same ideological camouflage that looks insane from a distance, but in the long-term Russian propaganda context appears entirely logical and rational, with a good chance of a positive response from a substantial segment of the population.

Yet nevertheless, it is purely a propaganda construct. Actually, it is the Russian army units that have behaved like fascist hordes in Ukraine. And especially if the war drags on for a long time, truth will out in Russia. Now the Ukrainians are putting up a heroic resistance. They are waging a 'holy war', a Great Patriotic War of their own, which will hopefully finally liberate them from the shackles of the Russian empire. It is in fact Russia that should undergo denazification, even an exorcism, which will eradicate the cult of war and imperial nationalism from Russian churches and souls.

Indeed, back in 2012, the Pussy Riot girls started on this with the 'punk prayer' in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which began with the words: 'Virgin Mother of God, Banish Putin! Banish Putin, Banish Putin!'[20]

1 Papež k Ukrajině: 'Jménem Božím vás žádám, zastavte tento masakr!' *Vaticannews.va*, 13 March 2022 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from https://www.vaticannews.va/cs/papez/news/2022-03/papez-jmenem-bozim-vas-zadam-zastavte-tento-masakr.html. English wording adopted from 'Mariupol became a city of martyrs of a fierce war ravaging Ukraine', *Golos Ukrainy*, 14 March 2022 [accessed 15 August 2022]. Available from http://www.golos.com.ua/article/357155. However, with some of his later positions and statements on the war in Ukraine, Pope Francis has created much embarrassment, to put it mildly. For instance, the supposed gesture of reconciliation during an Easter procession at Rome's Colosseum, with a Russian and a Ukrainian woman carrying the cross together, erased the moral difference between the aggressor and the victim, according to critics. The Pope was also criticised for attempting dialogue with, rather than condemning, Patriarch Kirill, one of the chief ideologues of Putin's current regime, as well as for quoting an unnamed head of state arguing that NATO too was to be blamed for the war erupting, as it needlessly 'barked at Russia's door'. However, the Vatican's relationship with the Orthodoxy, Russia and Ukraine is not the subject of this chapter.

2 O Kryme i spetsoperatsii na Ukraine. Glavnoye iz vystupleniya Putina v Luzhnikakh. *RIA Novosti*, 18 March 2022 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: https://ria.ru/20220318/putin-1778888167.html. English transcriptions adapted respectively from 'Russian President Putin speaks at Crimea celebration event – BBC News', *YouTube.com*, 18 March 2022 [accessed 16 August 2022], available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ss9A4qrzgrY&t=7s, and 'Putin spoke to a packed Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea', *bne IntelliNews*, 20 March 2022 [accessed 16 August 2022], available from https://intellinews.com/putin-spoke-to-a-packed-luzhniki-stadium-in-moscow-to-celebrate-the-eighth-anniversary-of-the-annexation-of-crimea-238603/

3 For more detail see Osoblyvosti relihiynoho i tserkovno-relihiynoho samovyznachennya ukrayins'kykh hromadyan: Tendentsiyi 2010–2018. Razumkov Centre, 26 May 2018 [accessed 11 August 2022]. Available from: http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2018_Religiya.pdf

4 Kozhna rosiys'ka bomba ostatochno vbyvaye mify pro 'russkiy mir' – Epifaniy. Ukrinform, 6 March 2022 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3421577-kozna-rosijska-bomba-ostatocno-vbivae-mifi-pro-russkij-mir-epifanij.html

5 Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii. President of Russia, 21 February 2022 [accessed 10 August 2022]. Available from: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828

6 Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022. Website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 28 May 2022 [accessed 17 August 2022]. Available from: https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en

7 Response by H. H. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca. *World Council of Churches*, 10 March 2022 [accessed 10 August 2022]. Available from: https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/response-by-hh-patriarch-kirill-of-moscow-to-rev-prof-dr-ioan-sauca-english-translation

8 Patriarkh Kirill i Yuliya Timoshenko boleye poluchasa besedovali 's glazu na glaz'. NEWSru.com, 29 April 2009 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: http://newsru.com/religy/29apr2009/patr_timo_print.html

9 Quoted from Lydia S. Tonoyan & Daniel P. Payne: The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009 and its Significance in Ukraine's Political and Religious Life. *Religion, State and Society,* 2010, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 257.

10 'Donbass za nami'. Moskva. Luzhniki. YouTube, 18 March 2022 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B73-gJKYvA

11 'Donbass za nami'. Ofitsial'nyy klip. YouTube, 15 May 2021 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMj5qD0sJ6Q

12 Vystupleniye Marii Zakharovoy v Luzhnikakh 18 marta 2022g. YouTube, 18 March 2022 [accessed 9 August 2022]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5qVFeFLivM

13 Patriarshaya propoved' v Nedelyu syropustnuyu posle Liturgii v Khrame Khrista Spasitelya. ROC website, 6 March 2022 [accessed 10 August 2022]. Available from: http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html

14 The cathedral has its own website: https://ghvs.ru/

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Masked members of Pussy Riot feminist punk group perform during their 'flashmob'-style protest inside Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. The girls were marched out of the cathedral by guards. Moscow, 21 February 2012.
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